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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the five-year Florida Foster Care and Adoption Plan which was developed to facilitate the provision of more effective services to children needing full time care outside the parental home. The paper is divided into five chapters plus an introduction and summary. The introduction outlines the problems facing the social service agencies and the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (DHRS) in Florida. The introduction also reviews the philosophy and priorities presented in the plan, the cost effectiveness implications, and strategies for providing more effective services. The first three chapters of the paper outline the basic objectives of the plan and recommend actions on the parts of the DHRS and of the State Legislature. Chapter I discusses the primary objective of maintaining children in their own homes. Chapter II describes recommended strategies for increasing the number of adoptive placements for children. Chapter III discusses the plan's objectives for the placement of children in foster care. Chapters IV and V describe the support systems necessary for the success of the Plan. Chapter IV reviews current and recommended information systems for DHRS. Chapter V describes the need for a training and staff development system to increase the number of people with specialized skills in social work and related fields. (BD)

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PROPOSED PLAN FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION SERVICES

for the

State of Florida

Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services

Social and Economic Services

PS009918

Submitted by

Mott-McDonald Associates, Inc.
Washington, D. C.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Barbara Cohen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

March 1977

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was initiated as a result of the strong interest on the part of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services in placing a higher priority on serving the most vulnerable of Florida's children.

The desire and willingness of the Secretary and his staff to take an honest look at family and children's services has provided a most constructive atmosphere in which to develop this proposed plan.

We are most appreciative of the cooperation extended to us by the DHRS staff in the Central Office as well as those with whom we met at the District Offices. In addition, the assistance provided to us by the legislative staff, DHEW Regional staff, members of community groups and other public and private agencies from whom we received guidance, has been most helpful.

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We sincerely hope that this joint effort will lead to changes which can result in many more of Florida's vulnerable children having the permanent, stable, and loving homes which they rightfully deserve.

Mott-McDonald Associates, Inc.

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

This project was undertaken to assist the Office of Social and Economic Services of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services with reviewing, designing and taking actions for the improvement of its foster care and adoption services. The project was comprised of four phases:

- Project Definition and Planning (August 1976). The first phase consisten of a series of meetings with DHRS staff to assure that the work plan addressed key concerns and issues.

- Data Collection and Research (August - September). Relevant policies, laws and DHRS procedures were studied. A questionnaire was used in interviewing a sample of all relevant participants in the DHRS foster care/adoption system. A total of approximately 190 interviews were conducted with major emphasis placed on direct workers (54 interviews). Seventy-seven (77) administrators/supervisors and 35 relevant out-of-agency "others" were also interviewed. In addition, 23 Central Office staff were questioned to obtain their perspective. All 11 districts were visited, on-site, by teams involving the special advisors. Department interviews were conducted in small groups (workers and administrators/supervisors).

- Analysis and Conceptualization (October). Following the data collection effort, a two day conference was held with a task force consisting of key DHRS staff and representatives of the District Office and the Legislature, plus the consultant team. The task force reviewed the interview data, developed and critiqued recommended goals, objectives and plans.

- System Plan and Recommendations (November - December). Recommendations made by the joint DHRS/consultant task force were used as the basis for developing a draft of the Plan. After further critique by DHRS staff, the report was revised to include the recommendations included herein.

In recognition of the abundant national studies in this area, our purpose was not to duplicate these efforts by an extensive evaluation in Florida, but, rather, to test the findings from other jurisdictions to the situation in Florida. Our work verified the general applicability of findings from other states, and the recommendations flow from successful experiences in other jurisdictions facing similar problems.

The report that follows is a summary of the deliberations described above. Additional background data has been provided the Department. The Introduction section outlines the problems and recommended goals and strategy. Chapters I - III outline three basic service objectives with recommended action steps to be taken by the Department and the Legislature. Chapters IV and V outline two supporting objectives on information system and staff development.

The time and scope of the planning process was such that DHRS could begin immediately to initiate a number of actions recommended within this report and designed to implement the proposed strategy. Therefore, to the Department's credit, many of the recommendations targeted for year #1 (current 1976-77 Fiscal Year) were accomplished, or actions to accomplish them were under way prior to the final report publication.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This proposed Florida Foster Care and Adoption Plan has been developed as a planning tool to assist the managers of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services to provide more effective services to Florida's most vulnerable children.

Statement of the Problem

Florida's concern for its dependent children is also a national problem. Whereas we used to have our focus on dependent children who were orphans, today, our concern for the dependent child primarily includes those referred to as "orphans of the living." They are products of illness, poverty, neglect, dependency or abuse. Too often they are disturbed and insecure. They are, by and large, innocent victims of social dysfunction. Some are emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, or delinquent, but most are victims of family breakups -- a rapidly increasing American phenomenon. From a sociological perspective, they are without family stability or continuity because their biological home environment has disintegrated. For them, their childhood years will lack permanence, and the resulting handicaps will become personal and national tragedies.

These are the children not living with their biological or legal parents, but who are receiving 24-hour care outside the parental home - or foster care. There are over 7,700 foster children in Florida at the time of this report and the number is increasing.

The foster relationship may arise either voluntarily or involuntarily. Over half of the foster children in the country have been voluntarily placed in foster care by an agreement between the parents and an agency, and this trend appears to be increasing.[1] The remainder have been placed involuntarily, as a result of a court order after the determination that the child is abused, neglected, abandoned, etc. In most cases, however, the foster care placement is intended to be a temporary one.

It is estimated that at the time children begin receiving foster care, most child welfare authorities expect that 75 percent of them will be eventually returned to their biological parents.[2] Unfortunately, these expectations too often go awry, a fact that has led to the description of foster care as a temporary arrangement being called a "pervasive myth."[3] In Florida, the average length of stay is not easily determined. The national average stay is five years.[4] If Florida's caseload experience is examined for those who have left foster care or reached the age of majority, the average should be correspondingly high. The average stay of the current caseload is lower, of course, due to the increasing number who have recently entered placement.

As Fanshel summarizes:

> "The major exodus out of care occurs during the first year after entry, when three out of ten children leave. Thereafter, there is a rapid, decline in the number of children discharged so that at the end of three years it has become a modest outflow and most children then in care seem destined to spend their remaining years of childhood as foster children."[5]

It is this problem that our report primarily addresses.

This unplanned, permanent placement has other unstabilizing aspects which are causes as well as effects of the foster care problem.

There is a continuing turnover in caseworkers so that any continuity in finding a foster child a permanent home or returning him or her to the biological parents is disrupted. Concomitantly, the influx of children is greater than the addition of caseworkers, so caseloads keep increasing. The caseworker tends to concentrate on the immediate crisis and the child creating "no problem" gets forgotten - or at least is not being helped toward permanence.

Caseworkers in Florida reported their own problem in not having access to enough foster family homes. They tend to overuse the existing resources until they, too, break down and the child must be moved to another home.

A study by Jeter showed that one-sixth of foster children had four or more placements.[6] A recent report shows a national average of 2.7 placements per child.[7] Again, Florida statistics do not record this measure, but a similar tendency for drifting among homes was reported in interviews.

Thus, it is understandable that the dependent child who is subject to this pattern, unable to make lasting, positive emotional attachments, is most likely to become the dependent adult. As Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit emphasized in their study,[8] "only the child who has at least one person whom he can love, and who also feels loved, valued, and wanted by that person will develop a healthy self-esteem...(without this) what is damaged is his love and regard for himself, and consequently, his capacity to love and care for others, including his own children."

This unnecessary void is the problem addressed in the following chapters.

Philosophic Perspective and Priorities

Derived from the above problems is a philosophy for Family and Child Services which is supported by a rapidly increasing number of child welfare leaders. It has two elements:

First, amid all the discussions about the rights of biological parents and adoptive parents there must be more recognition of the rights of the child -- and perhaps, that their rights should be given primacy over the others. Central to the rights of a child are the rights to permanence, stability, continuity, and nurture during childhood.

Second, if it can be agreed that Florida's children need a stable parent-child relationship, then it follows that a basic philosophic tenet for the Family and Child Services program ought to be to increase the proportion of children who are in stable family settings.

The acceptance of this basic perspective begins to provide a program framework in which the following goals can be listed in their order of priority:

- To increase the resources and competencies of families to cope with their problems in order to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families.
- To identify family problems and possible breakup early and mobilize resources to prevent disintegration in those situations where the prevention of child removal is desirable and possible.

- To mobilize services to restore broken families as viable units as quickly as possible, where appropriate.

- To place the child for adoption as quickly as possible and placing him or her in a suitable adoptive home, if restoration to the biological family within a stated time period relevant to the child's needs is not possible, or appropriate.

- To complete and implement a stable foster care plan if, within a stated time period relevant to the child's needs, the child cannot be placed for adoption using all known and available techniques to do so.

Prevention, restoration, adoption and planned permanent foster care are the hierarchy of goals, based upon our mission of providing stability and permanence to the life of the child. The strategy developed in this plan is designed to improve Florida's capacity to achieve these goals, at the highest level possible, for more of the children and families at risk in the State.

Cost Effectiveness Implications

Few areas of social service offer a better example of common agreement on the best alternatives of service for clients which also are in concert with cost benefit concerns than does the Family and Child Services area of responsibility.

It is no mere incidental concern that the cost effectiveness of providing the preferred forms of child welfare services are in line with these best practice options. Specifically, costs are the least for services designed to maintain children in their own homes, the second most economical choice is an adoption service. The most expensive service is foster care. Yet, present spending rates, nationally and in the State of Florida, are still being allocated in the reverse priority order.

In Florida, this past year $16,858,808 was spent on foster care for staff and board payments alone. This represents approximately two percent of the national total. This compares with the $3,836,845 Florida spent on staff to try and maintain approximately 19,000 children in their own homes. For adoption services, Florida last year spent only $622,735, less than one percent of the national expenditures. Half of the State amount was used to assist in the independent adoption process and the other half, or $311,367 for direct adoption placements by DHRS. This latter figure represents less than two percent of the State's foster care expenditures.

These funding imbalances are even more apparent when calculated over a number of child years. For example, if we examine the present costs incurred for one child over the average length of stay in foster care (estimated five years) and compare that with the other service alternatives, the current costs to the State for that child can be better understood. Further, when the State supports a child coming into foster care as an infant who must stay in care until he/she reaches his/her eighteenth birthday, the costs to the State become even larger. Table 1 depicts these present expenditures for staff and board payments only.

TABLE I

PRESENT COSTS OF MAINTAINING ONE CHILD IN 3 FORMS OF CARE
(Staff and board costs only)*

	Years in Care		
	1 yr	5 yrs	18 yrs
Maintain in own home	$ 212	$ 1,060	$ 4,016
Adoptive Placement (one time cost without subsidy)	$1,221	$ 1,221	$ 1,221
Foster Care	$2,180	$10,900	$39,240

*Not including medical costs which may be the same in all forms of care. Where parents receive AFDC payments, "maintain in own home" costs are, of course, higher, though not as high as foster care.

Strategy

It involves no risk to conclude from the above facts that there is a potentially high economic and human return on investment in maintaining children in their own homes or in adoptive placement.

The strategy for achieving the priority goals for more children must be to reduce the number of children in foster care and entering into foster care by addressing the caseload needs at both ends of the continuum of service:

- First, by placing special emphasis on providing the services to prevent children from having to enter foster care, as well as to reunite children already in foster care with their biological families, and to maintain them there.

- Second, and simultaneously, by taking initiatives to legally free present foster care children and place them in adoptive homes.

This strategy is offered as an alternative to the vicious cycle of providing additional resources to the present foster care system, a trend which only reinforces the present system, thus reducing the options available for providing new initiatives designed to prevent the ever-increasing influx into foster care. In other words, we see it as a necessity for Florida to break the trend of rapid foster care expansion -- both to serve its children and avoid unnecessary taxpayer expense.

If the Departmental effort is to be reflective of these priorities, and accepting of this strategy, it will require a reallocation of DHRS Family and Child Services resources through legal amendments, administrative actions and service improvements. The chapters that follow are designed to provide recommendations to the Department on how to move towards the achievement of these program goals.

It should be noted that during this project the Department was undergoing a massive reorganization. Major staff realignments, changes in administrative systems, and other problems were placing an

enormous strain on staff. One of the best antidotes to the confusion of a reorganization is to get a clear sense of mission. Therefore, it is an additional goal of these recommendations to help mobilize Social and Economic Services program staff around specific and meaningful goals which will constructively tap the potential of the new DHRS organization for serving children.

Each chapter proposes a primary objective (objectives 4 and 5 are supportive of the first three). Under each objective are implementing recommendations, labeled either:

Year 1 - To be completed in the current Fiscal Year (1976-77);
Year 2 - To be completed in Fiscal Year 1978;
or Year 3+ - To be completed in Fiscal Years 1979-81;
and
(L)- requiring Legislative action;
or (A)- requiring administrative action by DHRS only.

1. MAINTAINING CHILDREN IN THEIR OWN HOMES

1.0 Background

We have said that our first priority must be to assure that children remain in their own homes whenever it is possible and appropriate. Out-of-home care should constitute the exception rather than the rule. In essence, the task is to prevent dependency rather than try to alleviate it after it has become a problem.

Marital breakdown and stress leading to child abuse and neglect were the major underlying causes for children being placed in foster care according to our staff interviews. Our society witnesses a continual increase in marriage upheaval. Approximately 30 percent of all marriages of child bearing age end in divorce and the percentage is rising. Desertion, particularly among the poor, swells the number of broken homes by an additional 25 percent.

While services to assist families through difficult times is needed for all income groups, the need is most acute among the economically marginal family. The poor and near poor often face severe financial burdens that strain marital relationships. If the wife becomes ill, there are fewer resources for her to call on to care for her children. Counseling, financial assistance, day care, and homemaker services are hard to find. Low minimum wages, inadequate education, lack of jobs, low AFDC rates, and poor housing, all add stress to the low income family. Every family has its breaking point. Many are crying for help.

Parents going through a trauma are generally ambivalent about giving up their children to foster placement, but in the absence of needed family support and service, a decision to use foster care is too often made. In a California study, half of the foster parents interviewed felt placement could have been avoided.[1] In a Massachusetts study, 30 percent of the biological parents interviewed felt that the provision of needed services would have made foster care placement unnecessary. Twenty-three percent felt placement would have been unnecessary if they had received more timely, or simply some, family counseling. Seventeen percent said a homemaker would have prevented placement; and 29 percent stated that the availability of day care would have prevented placement.[2]

In Florida, these services were also felt by staff interviewed to be critical in supporting families. They also were shown to be listed among those most unavailable. Other services felt by DHRS staff to be missing and most needed were parenting education, financial support and emergency crisis intervention. A telling point was that staff felt in too many cases, conditions in the foster home were no better than the home from which the child came.

Often though, more help is available during the initial crisis than afterwards when parents could be helped in preparing for their child's return home. As the California report concludes: "Once the immediate pressure of the family situation is removed by the placement of the child, the parents are not usually constrained by the agency to resolve the problems so that the child may be returned home promptly."[3] In Florida, staff and others consistently reported that there usually was no written, well formulated, contract agreement, consistently used, to detail to parents what they must do to have their children returned, and little help was provided by the Department to assist them in meeting even these vague conditions.

Based on the above cited, and other studies, the Child Welfare League of America estimates that up to one-third of current foster care caseloads could be returned to their biological homes with proper support services. Sometimes counseling alone is found to be enough. We found no reason to believe that the situation in Florida is different. The problem is that the services necessary to return these children and maintain them in their biological homes have not been made a priority within the Department and the Legislature, although the intent of the new Court Review Law is to change this situation.

The following recommendations are therefore designed to support and enhance a Department priority on 1) reuniting children in foster care with their biological parents and 2) for maintaining children in their own homes.

1.1 Strategies for Reuniting Present Foster Care Children with Biological Families

We recommend setting a reasonable target for an increased number of children to be returned home from foster care during the next year. Considering the national estimates that one-third of current foster care children can be returned, we recommend that a more conservative figure of 25 percent be used as an initial objective. This figure, or 1,933 children, would represent an overall decrease in the current foster care caseload if no new children were added. A normal return rate of new placements should be determined and added to this figure for a total objective.

RECOMMENDED OBJECTIVE:

The Secretary of DHRS should set an objective of reuniting 1,933 present foster care children, or 25 percent of the present foster care caseload, with their biological families by the end of the first fiscal year following staff allocations to this task (preferably by June 1978).

In order to achieve this objective two options are offered to assist in implementation:

- New funds for staff and services
- Reallocation of existing resources

1.1.1 Option 1 -- Request New Funds for Staff and Services

To concentrate on these 1,933 children, a budgetary investment is recommended, first for the hiring of 50 new protective service workers with a specific responsibility for reuniting families. We believe it is important that, in the short run at least, a segment of the protective services staff be dedicated full time to this specialized task. It means that the performance of these workers should be judged on their ability to effect successful restoration of children with their biological families.

Without such a specialization, any new protective service workers will continue to be moved to respond to cases involving children presently in their own homes -- the current pattern. Foster care workers, who now have the responsibility for the biological parents of foster children, but who have not had time to provide these necessary services would be relieved of these responsibilities.

The resulting concentration by specialized workers should pay dividends. In addition to assuring a much higher reunion rate, these workers can also insure that the right of the parents are properly protected and that parents are thoroughly advised before other service workers initiate severence proceedings. Under this proposed arrangement, the child would, during the reunion process, relate to two workers: the prior foster care worker, and the new protective service specialist who will follow the child and be responsible for providing any necessary support services after reunion.

The addition of this staff will provide for less than a 40- 1 caseload to worker ratio for each worker and should allow for the provision of the restoration (protective) service necessary to accomplish the reuniting of these 1,933 children with their families.

The increased cost of 50 workers @ $10,000 per year is $500,000. If we add an additional 50 percent for support (clerical/supervisory and a capital improvement factor), an expenditure of $750,000 will be needed to reunite the 1,933 children with their families. This cost averages $388 per family.

In order to assure the maintenance of these children in their biological homes once reunited, thus reducing their chances of having to return to foster care, an additional $750,000 for day care and homemaker services to be concentrated on these 1,933 children, is advisable. This support averages another $388 per family. Although the specific use of these funds must be determined on an as-needed basis, the money will provide for 7,500 days of homemaker services (@ $50 per 8 hour day) and 53,571 days of day care (@ $7.00 per full day of care).

Together, these services will cost $1,500,000 of new money, or $776 per child.

Table II examines the expected costs and potential savings of only the board rate payments for maintaining these children in foster care for one year and for a full five years, (the estimated present average length of stay).

TABLE II

BOARD COST SAVINGS OF REUNITING 1,933 FOSTER CARE CHILDREN TO THEIR BIOLOGICAL HOMES

25% of 7,731 = 1,933 children	1 yr	5 yrs
Board costs only to retain in foster care (@ $1,556)	$3,007,000	$15,035,000
Total costs if reunited in own home and continued support needed (@ $776 for new staff and support service)	$1,500,000	$ 7,500,000
Gross savings (board savings only)	$1,507,000	$ 7,535,000

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (L)

The Secretary of DHRS should request $750,000 of new funds for the hiring of 50 new protective service workers to reunite 1,933 present foster care children with their parents, and an additional $750,000 for day care and homemaker services designed to maintain these children in their own homes.

1.1.2 Option 2 -- Reallocate Existing Resources

A reduction in staff could place further short term hardships on foster care clients, as well as staff. However, if we assume that 25 percent (or 1,933) of the present 7,731 foster care caseload will be transferred to protective service, then a concomitant transfer of 50 present foster care workers to follow these cases (selected District by District in accordance with caseload selection) would be an alternative in the event the Legislature refuses to provide resources. The long term benefit accrued through this alternative action far outweighs the short term discomforts.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

If option 1 fails, the Secretary of DHRS should transfer 50 present foster care workers to protective services and assign them responsibility for the 1,933 or more foster care cases identified as able to be reunited with their biological families. In addition, the use of existing department day care and homemaker resources should be earmarked for receipt by these 1,933 targeted children, to allow for permanent maintenance with their biological families.

1.2 Procedures and Guidelines for Reuniting Present Foster Care Children with Their Biological Families

To assist in meeting the objectives of reuniting 1,933 targeted foster care children with their biological families by the end of the next fiscal year, operating procedures, rules and responsibilities, and guidelines for implementation must be developed. Several critical actions must be taken:

- Through the conduct of a case-by-case assessment of the service needs of the 7,731 foster care caseload a list of specific children for reuniting with biological families, District by District, should be obtained. Consideration in the assessment should include the readiness and appropriateness of the family to accept the child back into the home -- assuming support services are provided, as necessary.

- A clear identification of the service needs of the child and the family must be determined and included within a developed permanent service plan. Time objectives should be included in the plan.

- Staff must be selected to work with the identified and selected cases. If Option 1 (new hires) is achieved, time must be allowed for the employment process. In both Options 1 & 2 (reassigned foster care workers) new roles and responsibilities will require pre-service training. A training curriculum and schedule must be devised, and then time provided for the conduct of the necessary training.

- A phased reuniting process should be scheduled and then initiated, in recognition of the above cited actions that must precede it.

- The provision of support services necessary to maintain the child in the biological home and meet the case objectives must be aggregated and made available.

- A follow-up evaluation of the success of the placement, through reporting of ongoing service needs, should be made every six months.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 and 2 (A)

The Director of SES should promulgate procedures and guidelines necessary to implement the policy for the reuniting of foster care children with their biological families. They should address a change in staff responsibility for services to the biological parents of these children from the foster care staff to new protective service specialists.

In addition, a case-by-case review should be conducted to obtain the specific names of those children to be returned to their biological homes. Service needs for each child and family should be assessed; a phased staff hiring and training process must be planned; and support services should be provided, as needed.

1.3 Policy for Maintaining Children in Their Own Homes

The Department should promulgate a policy designed to effectively implement this priority. In addition, standards should be developed and included which provide guidance on when children should, and should not, be removed from their own homes. Within the standards should be firm recognition of the rights of biological parents and a Departmental commitment not to overlook these rights.

In order to translate the significance of this new policy to staff the Department should employ the use of conferences and training sessions, as discussed in Chapter V. The activation of this policy will help to offset the tendency, as reported by staff, to remove children from their homes in order to "play it safe" and avoid criticism that can accrue in the event of subsequent neglect or abuse by the parents.

It should be noted that legal responsibility for removing children rests also with the courts, and they, too, have a tendency to remove children when provision of services could avoid this course. Relationships of DHRS staff with courts should be fostered to find ways to better support the proposed priority.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (A)

The Secretary of DHRS should promulgate a policy that directs Department staff to place priority on the use of DHRS resources for maintaining children in their own homes, whenever possible and appropriate, as the preferred alternative to foster care.

1.4 Inter-Departmental Efforts on Basic Family Support Services

The alleviation of the factors which lead to family breakups and undue stress, as well as child abuse and neglect, must be recognized as a concern of other agencies, in addition to the DHRS. For example, education, housing and employment issues all are potential problem areas which can cause major family disruption. A comprehensive program for maintaining children in their own homes, therefore, must include an effectively coordinated State-initiated, inter-departmental effort to address these broader family concerns. Florida already has shown recognition of this issue with the establishment of the Governor's Committee on Marriage and the Family. Departmental support to this effort should be continued and expanded. A particular item for the Committee's attention might be consideration of a parenting education course within the public school curriculum.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (A)

The Secretary of DHRS should provide a copy of this report to the Governor's Committee on Marriage and the Family and request their assistance and support in developing an effective statewide, inter-departmental effort designed to reduce the causes of family breakup.

1.5 DHRS Mental Health Family Support Services

It is understandable that the factors contributing to family break-up are also reflected in emotional stress. It, therefore, follows that an integral part of a preventive program must include mental health services to vulnerable families. These services should include family counseling, respite care, day treatment programs, etc. Our staff interviews indicated that the major current need for child welfare clients is mental health service. DHRS/SES staff interviewed saw these resources as being "almost non-existent." However, discussions with DHRS central office mental health program staff describe a Department supported community mental health program which provides these very services to their respective communities.

Although DHRS is the prime state agency responsible for the publicly supported services, mental health staff describe a service system which is primarily responsive to community boards, not Departmental direction (e.g., DHRS objectives and priorities, the types of clients to be reached or the types of services most needed by Department clients). Whereas, we respect and strongly support community decision-making, we do feel that generic state-wide guidelines for basic priorities must be followed if a Department-wide human service effort is to be successful. State guidelines could mandate community decision-making which includes all DHRS (and relevant other) agencies in planning and service priority determination. Only if all vulnerable groups are equally represented is community decision-making legitimate.

We find no rational reason to accept the present condition in which an SES top priority need is left unmet when, at the same time, a sister-DHRS agency is specifically responsible for providing that identical service. The theory of service integration can become real only when applied to specific issues, such as this most critical one.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (A)

The Secretary of DHRS should promulgate a policy which provides priority attention by the Office of Mental Health Services to maintaining children in their own homes. Further, he should instruct the directors of Mental Health and SES to develop guidelines for the effective implementation of this policy.

1.6 Development and Phased Implementation of a Comprehensive Emergency Service Program

Questionnaire results confirm a staff belief that the Department too easily accepts children into foster care. Thirty-one percent of the interviewees strongly expressed this view. The reason most often offered for this practice was the lack of available services designed to maintain children in their own homes.

The target group of children to be maintained in their own homes are the 19,000 children presently under the protective care of the Department. In the vast majority of cases, the presenting problems of these children in need of service were related to a crisis. Abuse and neglect cases were two of the primary reasons for referral. Workers often felt that their only alternative in the absence of service availability, to guarantee the safety of the child, was to recommend removal from the home.

DHRS should promote the implementation of a comprehensive emergency service program designed to prevent family break-up and be responsive to family crisis. Evidence clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of such programs.

1.6.1 Comprehensive Emergency Service

The recommended service approach, initiated and proven successful in Nashville, Tennessee is called the Comprehensive Emergency Service (CES) Program. (The CES program operated by the Chicago Juvenile Welfare Board appears to be very effective, but also is very costly. It, too, could be explored for potential replication.) The CES is a community-wide family support network designed to be responsive to families in crisis. The intent is to provide assistance to the family before the need arises for a child to be removed from the family setting and placed in foster care. The system consists of the following component services:

- 24-hour Emergency Intake
- Emergency Caretakers
- Emergency Homemakers
- Emergency Foster Family Homes
- Emergency Shelter for Families
- Outreach and Followup
- Emergency Shelter for Adolescents

A community employing the CES makes available the full range of these services to any family in need of support. The appropriate quantity of each component for varying population groups has been developed by the Nashville team which is also available to provide free assistance, upon request.

Jacksonville has been working on developing such a CES program in their community for some time and stands ready to initiate a system in cooperation with DHRS. St. Petersburg and Gainesville have also expressed their interest in beginning a similar program. The design coordinates existing community resources and adds to them any new component as needed.

Table III depicts the estimated costs of a CES program based on costs reported in Nashville (which include information and referral cases without additional cost).

TABLE III

COST FOR CES IN 3 CITIES

Cities	Estimated Referrals	Total Costs
Jacksonville	3,717	@ 92.80 = $344,937.60
Tampa/St. Petersburg	1,730	@ 92.80 = $160,544.00
Gainesville	358	@ 92.80 = $ 33,222.40
Totals	5,805	@ 92.80 = $538,704.00

Recognizing that a CES program would be a partnership of various public and private agencies in each District, we estimate DHRS participation at no more than two-thirds the total cost. Therefore, a budget of $360,000 should be adequate to support the first phase of a CES program in the three cities identified.

In addition, in order for the Department to make rational decisions on the expansion of the CES effort state-wide (in succeeding phases of its implementation), DHRS should consider an effort to initiate and conduct a three year evaluation of CES effectiveness in the three identified cities. The study should measure the CES capability of reducing the need for foster care and maintaining families intact during crisis.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The Secretary of DHRS should initiate the implementation of the Comprehensive Emergency Service Program in a phased manner, beginning with state funding of $360,000 for Jacksonville, St. Petersburg and Gainesville.

II. ADOPTIVE PLACEMENTS FOR CHILDREN

2.0 Background

When it is clear that a child cannot or should not be reunited with the biological parents, the Department should move toward legal adoption as the next best choice. Adoption is not only the next most cost effective alternative to prolonged foster care, but is the most positive response to the child's right to a permanent, caring family.

The major barrier to adoption for many of Florida's children is attitude. People have thought of healthy infants as the adoptable group, and the handicapped, minority, or older children as "unadoptable" or "hard to place."

The attidude is not uncommon among caseworkers who label a child informally as "unadoptable." Once that label is informally placed, usually after a child has been in foster care for over a year without much sign of movement one way or the other, less attention is paid and the long term foster care becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

One of the prime discouragements to caseworkers are legal barriers beginning with the difficulty of terminating parental rights. Those interviewed felt the laws were too vague (abandonment definitions were often cited). The lack of adequate legal representation was felt to be a major deterrant.

The consequence of these factors is that there is widespread confusion among staff about the Department view of adoption services and its proper role as a vital part of the total Family and Children's Services Program. This confusion has resulted in a relatively weak program with no adoption services offered in some Districts, and only "fractional" workers in other areas. We counted 14.5 workers assigned to direct placement adoptions, with 15 other workers responsible for the independent adoption cases. The 14.5 workers have succeeded in placing approximately 250-275 children per year.

It is true that most of the foster care caseload consists of children who used to be called "hard to place" (minority, handicapped, or over four years old), but are now more positively considered to be children with special needs. This is not different from the situation in other states. National studies have indicated that 25-30 percent of the foster care children could be freed for adoptive placements.[1,2] Experiences around the country (Los Angeles, Washington, D. C., Chelsea, Michigan and other areas) have demonstrated how special needs children can be successfully placed for adoption. Partly this success is due to the lack of availability of healthy white infants for adoption, and to the more enlightened attitudes of prospective adoptive parents and agencies.

2.1 Strategies for Placing More Foster Care Children In Permanent Adoptive Homes

There are families for these special needs children in Florida. Based on the previously cited studies, 2,100 of Florida's 7,700 foster care children could be freed for adoption and placed. We believe DHRS could reasonably set a goal of increasing the current level of adoptive placements, therefore, from the current level of 250 per year to 550 per year for the next several years. Such an initiative will require support from the Legislature for an initial investment, but will generate long term savings of many more dollars, as well as lives.

RECOMMENDED OBJECTIVE:

The Secretary of DHRS should set an objective of increasing adoptive placements by 300 per year.

2.2 The Placements Must Be Made In the Best Interest of the Child

The first obstable to overcome in accomplishing the Department objective is the one of attitude. While children in foster care who cannot be returned to their parents cannot all be placed for adoption, the presumption must first be made that adoption is possible until proven otherwise. Some may need continuing institutional care, some older teenagers may prefer a group home experience, but most others would profit from belonging to a permanent, loving family.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (A)

The Secretary should enunciate a policy on making placements in the best interest of the child, with a priority on action to terminate parental rights and seek adoptive placement when children are determined not able to be returned to their biological parents.

2.3 Secure Resources Necessary to Meet the Adoption Objective

There are two options suggested for implementing the adoption objective: 1) obtain new funds for staff and services; and if that fails 2) reallocate existing resources.

2.3.1 Option 1 - Obtain New Funds for Staff and Services

A budgetary investment is recommended for the hiring of 15 new adoption workers. The addition of this staff will provide for the placement and support by DHRS of an additional 300 children per year. Caseloads nationally range from 10 or 12 placements per worker for the most difficult cases to 30 to 35 cases for infant and other less time-consuming placements. If we assume a mixed caseload, this would provide for a workable 20 placements per worker, an average rate proved attainable in other jurisdictions.

The new adoption workers would be expected to perform the following functions:

- Severance of parental rights*;
- Counseling of child, biological (or foster) and adoptive family;
- Recruitment of adoptive homes;
- Placement of children in adoptive homes;
- Follow up to adoptive family.

At $10,000 per worker the increased cost incurred will be $150,000. If we add clerical and supervisory support (and a capital improvement factor) for these workers at 50%, or $75,000, the total staff costs for 300 placements will be $225,000. This cost averages $750 per placement.

*It should be noted that we suggest this function be shifted from foster care staff to adoption workers to assure proper continuity and priority. Further, this should reduce an added responsibility placed on the foster care workers.

If we provide resources for necessary support services to the adoptive child and family, a doubling of the $225,000 will bring the total costs to $450,000, which is an average of $1,500 per adoptive child placement.

The cost savings incurred by placing a child in a permanent adoptive home, over retaining him/her in a foster care setting are dramatic,as shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV

BOARD COST SAVINGS OF PLACING FOSTER CARE CHILDREN IN ADOPTIVE HOMES

Number of Children Placed	Cost of Board Payment Saved Per Year (excluding Staff & Support Services	Cost of Board Payment Saved For 5 Years (Average Length of Foster Care)	Cost of Adoptive Service (including Support Services)	Net Savings (or available for adoption subsidy fund)*
1	$ 1,556	$ 7,780	$ 1,500	$ 6,280
300	$466,800	$2,334,000	$450,000	$1,884,000

*Savings do not reflect replacement costs for adoptive placements which are not successful, but the savings of foster care staff time and support services are also not included. Kadushin[3] and Fanshel[4] report that four percent of less time-consuming cases (e.g., infants) require a second placement, and for special needs children the figure is closer to 12 percent.

Many states have inserted enabling legislation into their foster care board rate statutes which provide for the use of these funds for the cost of subsidized adoptive placements; i.e., the payment follows the child. We recommend such action be taken for the use of the net savings described in Table IV. This appears to be in concert with current Florida legislative intent regarding the new Adoption Subsidy Act.

A second variation to consider is increasing the adoption placement rate through the use of purchase of service contracts with private licensed providers. Eighty-one percent of the respondents to our questionnaire were most supportive of this idea. Assuming the private agencies might be able to move more quickly than DHRS, recognizing the problems in hiring of new workers and conducting orientation and training, the cost savings of foster care could be maximized through contracts for adoptive placement.

A fixed fee, providing for the full costs of placement, and in accordance with the State costs for placement could be set, dependent upon the resources necessary to place the child (e.g., $1,000 for infants and up to $3,500 for special needs children). An average of $2,000 per case appears legitimate and consistent with payments made in other jurisdictions. In addition to the time and cost savings achieved, this variation provides for maximized use of all Florida resources to meet this pressing State need. Private agencies we interviewed are most willing to work in partnership with DHRS to show what they can do

in placing special needs children for adoption.

Payments on a "per placement" reimbursement basis assures DHRS of only paying for what it receives. We recommend the Secretary reserve $200,000 (100 placements @ $2,000 each) for purchase of service contracts.

This variation, if implemented in addition to the DHRS in-house objective, could expand additional placements per year to 400. The Department could follow a procedure which sets a 90 day time limit for placement by staff after which the child is made available to voluntary agency providers. This procedure permits foster care and adoption workers the time to explore placement options with the foster parents or others already known to them as good potential parents.

We prefer the second approach because it combines the responsiveness of purchase of service with the improved productivity and caseload movement within the Department. In addition, the use of a public/private mixture in the provision of services creates an atmosphere of unified support to the adoption needs of the State.

RECOMMENDATION: YEARS 1 and 2 (L)

The Secretary should request $450,000 for the hiring of 15 new adoption staff and support services to place 300 additional foster care children in adoptive placements each year. In addition, he should request an additional $200,000 for purchase of service contracts with private agency providers to be used to place an additional 100 children per year, at $2,000 per placement.

2.3.2 Option 2 - Reallocate Existing Resources

As cited, presently some DHRS foster care staff are providing for the severing of parental rights. These staff could be viewed as performing an adoption function. Therefore, if option 1 fails, we suggest consideration be given to transfering that responsibility along with 15 severance workers to the adoption staff. Their responsibilities should then be expanded to include the full range of adoption activities outlined above. Pre-service training is recommended.

This transfer of foster care staff to adoption responsibilities should be counter-balanced with the transfer of those children initially identified for adoption to the new workers.

In the absence of new support service funds, DHRS service funds would have to be earmarked from existing resources for these 2,100 children, as needed each year.

RECOMMENDATION (if Option 1 fails): YEAR 2 (A)

If option 1 fails, the Secretary of DHRS should move immediately to transfer both personnel, and responsibility for the severing of parental rights from foster care staff to the adoption staff to provide for the placement of an additional 300 children in permanent homes each year. If new funds are not appropriated, the Department should earmark existing service funds for receipt by this targeted group of 2,100 children.

2.4 Procedures and Guidelines for Placing Present Foster Care Children in Permanent Adoptive Homes

To assist in meeting the objective of placing foster care children in adoptive homes at an additional rate, operating procedures, roles and responsibilities guidelines for implementation and training programs must be defined and implemented.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary should promulgate procedures and guidelines for the implementation of the priority for the placement of children in adoptive homes. These should address:

- The transfer of severance responsibility from foster care to adoption services;
- The hiring and training of new adoption workers;
- The formalization of a child welfare case planning and review process;
- The severance of parental rights;
- The placement of adoptive children; and
- The evaluation of the achievement of case objectives.

2.5 Recruitment of Adoptive Families

While an attempt is being made to free designated foster care children for adoption, a similar new initiative must be forthcoming in finding new adoptive families. In this regard, the attitude and role of workers is paramount. Only 16 percent of the DHRS staff interviewed felt the Department's effort to recruit adoptive homes was adequate. Given today's caseload of special needs children, adoption workers should see their roles primarily as enablers of adoptive placements, not investigators of applicants. This perspective implies a perception of applicants as probable healthy individuals (resources) rather than persons needing problem-solving help (clients). Based upon this premise, the first resources to be explored should be the foster parent population. Staff interviewed felt that all too often meaningful foster parent relationships are severed in cases in which they are most interested in adopting the child.

In addition, an aggressive public recruitment program utilizing the mass media, including the use of photographs, TV spots, speakers bureaus, and newsletters, should be developed to be used within each District, supported by adoption staff and coordinated with central office support and a new State Adoption Exchange effort.

A particularly effective adoptive home recruitment effort relying on the mass media is used by the Washington, D. C. Adoption Resource Exchange. Through a televised campaign of photographs and personal stories of individual children, upwards of 300 interested replies are achieved. This group receives an immediate invitation to attend an evening meeting at which the roles and responsibilities of adopting families are discussed in small groups. At the evening's conclusion, all invitees are told of their preliminary acceptance as adopting parents. Successive bi-weekly meetings, in small groups, provide for a most effective self-selecting out process, sometimes with needed staff encouragement, of inappropriate parents. However, the long-waits and high

anxiety of never knowing if "I will" or "will not" get a child is handled immediately. Once placements are made, the same parent group remains together to provide peer support at periodic evening meetings. The success of this approach in Washington and other areas of the country deserves DHRS attention.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Director of SES should develop a state-wide, district operated recruitment campaign for adoptive families to include:

- A review of foster parents' availability for adoptive parenthood, and
- A mass media public education and recruitment effort.

2.6 Establishment of a State-Wide Adoption Resource Exchange for Children with Special Needs

The concept of an adoption exchange is now nationally recognized as an effective means of assisting in placement. Florida used to have an exchange, but it is no longer in operation. A Florida Adoption Exchange should be initiated internally or by contract. Functions of the Exchange should include the use of specific case descriptions and photos; identification of training needs for adoption staff; the coordination of a state-wide mass media home recruitment program; and the organizing of regular meetings for District adoption staff to encourage the development of placement opportunities and the sharing of current issues of adoption practice.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary should establish a centralized Florida Adoption Resource Exchange to provide state-wide support to the adoption program.

2.7 The Provision of Legal Services for Adoption

Substantial concern was expressed by staff throughout the State over the absence of adequate legal services for the agency, the worker, and the client in the adoption process, much of which involves court action and court authority. Workers who are often unfamiliar with legal procedures and have inadequate legal assistance often fail to initiate appropriate legal actions or unduly delay such decisions. There is insufficient legal staff available in the Department, or through present contractual agreements to prepare all children who qualify for adoption. Two options are presented for consideration:

- Request new funds for Department attorneys
- Request statutory clarification to provide for DHRS use of the State's Attorneys

2.7.1 Option 1 -- Request New Funds for Department Attorneys

Adoption, as a legal process, requires the courts to terminate parental rights to free a child for adoption. This activity requires social work trained professionals to work in an arena, the court process, in which they are not well prepared. They are asked to present petitions, prepare briefs, and argue cases with lawyers representing the other side; decisions on the future lives of children are always involved.

A staff of six attorneys could provide necessary support to the extra 300 adoption cases proposed. Each attorney could be responsible for an average of two Districts. They would be responsible for advising line staff on gathering evidence, for preparing petitions and briefs, for conducting hearings and arguing appeals, and for training and consultation generally.

Six lawyers at $20,000 each would cost $120,000. If we add 50 percent for support (clerical/supervisory and a capital improvement factor) at $60,000, a total package of $180,000 is requested to support this effort.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The Secretary of DHRS should request $180,000 of budgetary support for the hiring of six Department attorneys to provide legal support in adoption cases.

2.7.2 Option 2 -- Request Statutory Clarification to Provide DHRS Use of the States Attorneys for Adoption Services

In the absence of receiving funds for the hiring of Department staff attorneys, in which direct line responsibility and work schedule could be controlled more effectively, we propose the use of the State's Attorney, located in each court throughout the State. Assuming an interest, these identified prosecutors in each court could receive guidelines developed by the Department to assist them in uniformly providing the adoption services required.

RECOMMENDATION (If Option 1 fails): YEAR 2 (L)

The Secretary should recommend statutory clarification to provide for the State's Attorney (prosecutor) in each county to designate competent and interested legal staff to assist in the preparation of legal proceedings and their prosecution. Such counsel should be required to follow appropriate cases through appeal, after approval of the intention to appeal by the Secretary, or his designee. This would specifically alter the current obligation of the State's Attorney (prosecutor) to become involved only in contested cases. In addition, the Secretary, or his designee, should promulgate written guidelines and guidance materials for State's Attorneys working on adoption cases.

2.8 Subsidy Law Guideline Development

Concern was expressed during interviews with Department staff regarding eligibility determination for receipt of an adoption subsidy, specifically which children referred from private, licensed agencies are eligible for subsidy and under what conditions.

DHRS must assure that all reasonable steps for an unsubsidized placement are taken before subsidy is considered; such steps to include the use of the North American Adoption Exchange, recruitment through the media, and referral to specialized adoption placement agencies.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (A)

The Director of SES should develop guides and procedures for the implementation of the Adoption Subsidy Program to include eligibility determination, a process for application, and a process for demonstrating that all reasonable steps for placement without subsidy were taken prior to application.

2.9 Review of the Effects of the Adoption Subsidy Law

An effective adoption subsidy program is essential to achieving the stated legislative goal and proposed Department policy of permanence for all children who cannot, or should not return to their biological homes.

The recently passed Florida statute (HB 3612) has at least two major flaws which render it virtually unusable.

2.9.1 Limited Subsidy Support for Three Years

Provision, Section 4(1)(a), limiting support and maintenance to three (3) years effectively eliminates current foster parents from applying to adopt. Foster parents need assurance that by adopting they will not jeopardize their long-run capacity to support the adopted child. This assurance will continue if they refuse to adopt and retain the child in foster care. By including the limitation, the Florida statute eliminates the use of subsidy in the circumstances where it is needed most (children with existing ties to foster families). Data should be collected during the first year to evaluate the impact of the three year limitation.

RECOMMENDATION: YEARS 1 and 2 (A)

The Director of SES should collect data to evaluate the impact of the three year adoption subsidy limitation as preparation for a recommended amendment to the law.

2.9.2 Funding for the Subsidy

As discussed above, the transfer of foster care children into adoptive homes provides major fiscal savings to the State in foster care board payments alone. Other states have recognized these cost savings and have followed the philosophy that board

support payments should follow the child. Therefore, many state legislatures have specifically amended their legislation to allow for foster care board payment savings to be utilized for adoption subsidy.

It is clear that some additional medical funds will be needed in most cases to supplant the child's loss of Medicaid eligibility upon placement in an adoptive home. The use of board payment savings should be explored and, if not allowable, new funds should be requested.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (L)

The Secretary should initiate a letter request of the appropriate legislative committee chairman to confirm that foster care board payment savings received through the placement of foster children in adoptive homes can follow the foster child into the adoptive placement, and, thus provide an adoption subsidy in those cases provided for within the new adoption subsidy law. In addition, the Secretary should request new funds for the continued medical benefits needed by those newly adopted children who lose their Medicaid benefits as a result of being adopted.

2.10 Amendment to the Legal Definition of Abandonment

In 1975, the legislature amended Section 39.11 to provide for permanent commitment to the Division of Family Services "if, after a period of one year, a diligent search has failed to locate the parents of an abandoned child which was placed in a foster care home." This is a substantially longer period of time than other states require and, thereby makes it more difficult to free children for permanent adoptive placement. This time restriction appears to be unduly delaying of an adoptive placement of abandoned babies to the detriment of the children involved. Child welfare authorities agree that adoptive placement should occur as early as possible for optimum development of the child. The courts have chosen to interpret the 1975 amendment as superseding previous definitions. The Department should be given discretion to recommend earlier action in cases in which such action is warranted.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The legislature should give the Department discretion in petitioning for a finding of abandonment, and for permanent commitment at any time up to the one year mandatory time limit.

2.11 Amendment to the Legal Definition of Neglect

The Florida statute (39.11) is substantially less precise in its definition of neglect than is currently accepted by standard setters and model statutes. The more precise the definition, the more uniform the interpretation and, the lower the cost of legal proceedings which may otherwise be prolonged as a result of ambiguity. Further, looseness delays and complicates the process of freeing children for adoptive placement.

The current requirement that parental refusal or neglect have occurred "substantially and continuously" (Section 39.11(2)(d)) results in the denial of an opportunity for meaningful family ties by adoption for children whose parents merely send an annual Christmas card or have other token contact. Judicial interpretation of this clause in favor of parents, too often frustrates the intent of the legislature "to provide to all children who can benefit by it, a permanent family life." (Section 63.022)

Other states have dealt with similar problems. In New York the courts formerly permitted a "flicker of interest" by the parent to prevent responsible planning for permanence and termination of parental rights. In its recent session, the New York legislature corrected this interpretation to bring the law into line with the stated concern for the child's best interest. Failure to amend this section of the Florida law will continue to allow many parents to "use" the State to raise their children at no expense to themselves.

Further, an amendment should be considered which specifically defines circumstances of substantial risk or harm to the child, rather than relying on their "being unfit by reason of their conduct or condition which is seriously detrimental to the child's welfare." (Section 39.11(2)(d)). More detailed listings such as are contained in model termination of parental rights statutes or standards should be considered.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The Secretary should request a review of model statutes and relevant recent statutory reform in other states to assist him in developing a basis for recommending an amendment to the Florida neglect statutes.

2.12 Amendment for Legal Independent Adoptions

Independent adoptions create intense public interest. They should not be taken out of perspective. The failure to find any permanent family for so many Florida children must be seen as the most substantial issue. This is particularly true in the absence of any systematic evidence of harm to those children placed through independent means. The Florida statute (Section 63) contains many effective provisions for dealing with abuses in the independent process. Enforcement through prosecution under the current provisions should deal effectively with many of the most serious concerns. A tightening of two legal provisions might be helpful:

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The legislature should amend the following two sections regarding independent adoptions:

- The Court should be required to approve all payments in connection with the independent adoption; the adopting parent(s) and biological parent(s) should be required to submit personal affidavits of amounts paid or received, in addition to that submitted by the intermediary; and

- A new provision should be proposed prohibiting the receipt of a child into a home for the purposes of adoption by any parent(s) until the completion and filing of a favorable preliminary report by DHRS staff.

There should be little, if any, problem with "actual documented medical court costs and hospital costs," (Section 63.097) but failing to report all payments for court approval may encourage inappropriate omissions.

Stricter enforcement of Section 63.092 (Report of Intended Placement by an Intermediary) could reduce the incidence of violation.

2.13 Amendment Regarding Putative Fathers

Concern was expressed by staff over delays in adoptions rising out of current practice related to the rights of putative fathers. The vast majority of putative fathers have little or no interest in the child, or in blocking adoptions.

Florida has provided in Section 63.062(1)(b)(4) for acknowledgement to trigger a requirement for consent. Statutes in Michigan[5] and New York[6] call for a mechanism for registering the interest of fathers. This action has been shown to reduce both delay and the cost of locating and notifying fathers pursuant to Stanley v. Illinois (U.S. Supreme Court, 1971).

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The legislature should provide a mechanism for the registration of interest by the putative father pursuant to Section 63.062(1)(b)(4).

2.14 Amendment Regarding Adoption Fees

Section 409.155 provides for the charging of fees to adoption applicants. This procedure is counter-productive when the major adoption task is the placing of older and handicapped children. Adoption should appropriately be seen as a service to children, rather than adults. This philosophy is essential if Title XX eligibility for hard-to-place children is to be legitimately claimed. Adoption, as a child centered service, will permit Federal Financial Participation (FFP) for all children since prior parental rights have been terminated, declaring the child as a family of one, and thus eliminating consideration of the income of the biological parent or the prospective adoptive parent.

The State's interest must be to provide a service to the child designed to achieve a permanent and stable home. The precedent set in the new Subsidy Law, in which fees are waived, should be extended to all adoption cases. The presence of fees serves as a disincentive to adoption. Unlike medical costs, such fees are not deductible. The basic issue, however, is one of philosophic principle and this calls for the family to be viewed as part of the solution and not part of the problem.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The legislature should repeal Section 409.155 of the Law, thereby eliminating fees for all adoptive placements.

2.15 Procedural Modifications in the Inter-State Compact

Dissatisfaction with delays involved with the Inter-State Compact was repeatedly expressed by staff throughout the State.

Because of the nature of the Compact, a unilateral statutory amendment may be inappropriate or, at best, ineffective. Florida may wish to consider initiating an administrative review of Compact revisions causing the delays with sister Compact states or use the national meetings of Compact administrators for that purpose. Such a review might lead to a procedure which provides for the sending of concurrent duplicate original documentation through other state Compact administrators, as well as through the DHRS system, notice of the case action requested, and the appropriate authorizing intervention. This change could reduce time delay, now exaggerated as a result of the necessity to await prior approval by Compact administrators in both states before the staff actually involved with the child can complete the desired transfer.

Since an amendment of the Compact cannot be affected by unilateral action, a more immediate, though partial remedy may lie in administrative procedures which put tight time limits on each step of the required transmission, or approval of documentation.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 3 (A)

The Secretary should consider administrative actions designed to reduce time delays in the use of the Inter-State Compact.

2.16 Administrative Investigation Into Issues Regarding Open Records

Current controversy exists around practice relating to the confidentiality of adoption records. Adoptees, as adults, are asserting a constitutional right to full access to both court and agency files.

Many are calling for required disclosure of all pertinent non-identifying data to adopting parents and adoptees at maturity. In addition, DHRS should explore the idea of establishing a registry so that current wishes regarding disclosure of identity of both adoptee and biological parent can be made known. When both desire contact, the State should also consider making available to past adoptees and their adopting parents, non-identifying data which may not have been disclosed at the time of the adoption, in accordance with prior practice.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 3 (A)

The Secretary should establish a study group to formulate policy and procedures which are responsive to current concerns regarding open records.

III. PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

3.0 Background

We have recommended objectives to hasten the desired movement of children from foster care to their original families or to permanent new homes through adoption. There are some children too, for whom longer term foster care is necessary. In such cases, placement must be planned to give as much security and nurture as possible.

Whether foster care is temporary, as it should truly be in most cases, or permanent until or beyond the age of majority, a more careful pursuit of a planned objective is what must characterize foster care services. It is not only that long term foster care is so often unplanned, but it is marked by the disruption of repeated placements, turnover of caseworkers, and simple inattention due to other crises and pressures as outlined in the introduction to this report.

3.1 Establishment of a Family and Children's Service Case Planning and Review Process

The new Judicial Review Law is an important factor in insuring a regularized process to avoid forgetting children previously placed in foster care. It is only one factor, however, in what should be a larger administrative process which should include, for every child placed in foster care:

- A diagnostic assessment within 30 days of placement to set quantifiable, written case objectives -- in other words, a permanency plan agreed to by the District team involved (e.g., protective service worker, foster care worker, unit supervisor, etc.);
- A written "contract" with parents specifying what the parents and DHRS will do to bring about the conditions under which the child can be expected to be returned home;
- Reviews of progress against objectives by the caseworker, or team, at least every 90 days
- A formal administrative review of case progress every six months. This will simultaneously serve as preparation for the original judicial review and every other six months, for the annual judicial review; and
- A formal reporting mechanism which assures management at all levels that the above steps have been taken with an accounting for results.

It is important that a reasonably uniform procedure be adopted in each District. Such a procedure will involve the combination of workers whose joint efforts are required to implement the permanency plans, with the Unit Supervisors, Program Specialists, and Program Supervisor taking specific responsibilities at various levels of decision-making related to each child and family.

Because of the natural tendency to leave children alone in foster care who are not "causing a problem," the planning and review process must involve real accountability for assuring progress for each child toward the permanency goal. Withouth such accountability, the tendency to "wait and see if the situation changes" will be irresistable, and crisis management will predominate. Therefore, we urge the following...

RECOMMENDED OBJECTIVE:

> By the end of Fiscal Year 1978, each child in foster care will have a written permanency plan within 30 days of his/her initial placement; caseworker reviews every 90 days, and administrative reviews involving designated supervisory staff every six months, with the results confirmed by means of a formal reporting system.

3.2 Procedures for Implementing Judicial Review

The best first step in meeting the above objective is full implementation of the new law requiring court review six months from the child's entry into the system, and at least annually thereafter.

It is important that the procedures developed for judicial review not duplicate those used for internal administrative review. Forms and reports needed for judicial review should be but an extension of regular case review procedures, although the information required for the court may vary somewhat in each jurisdiction.

A target should be set with each District for the number of petitions submitted monthly to bring the existing caseload up to date in conformity with the new law. In addition, a reporting system needs to be installed to tell the Department (and the Legislature) the number of children in foster care, the number of petitions filed, the number of hearings conducted and dispensed, and the types of court orders or outcomes resulting from the judicial review process.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (A)

> The Director of SES should promptly formalize procedures for implementing the Judicial Review Law and for reporting on the status and progress of all children in foster care.

3.3 Evaluating the Judicial Review Law

Florida's new law has the potential to become among the most effective in the nation. It comports with recently passed legislation in other jurisdictions. At its best, the review provides support to caseworkers who otherwise find it difficult to take risks alone in the interest of reuniting families or moving toward adoption. If careful and objective screening of the recommendations concerning each case is not accomplished, the review process can easily degenerate into resented "paper shuffling."

During this first year, the law should be evaluated by DHRS and the Legislature with a view to making further changes.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The effectiveness of the Judicial Review Law should be evaluated during its first year; modifications which should be given consideration include:

- A policy that no dispensation of a hearing be agreed to in any case in which a child has been in care for over two years, or who has been in and out of care more than twice;
- That copies of timely and routine reports and recommendations generated by administrative reviews within DHRS be used by the court and accepted in compliance with the statute unless otherwise determined to be inadequate; and
- Strengthening of the law to assure that a substantive review will, in fact, be made, and authorization of the use of court-appointed staff, or volunteers, to assist judges in preparing for such reviews.

3.4 Staff Workload and Utilization Assessment

The steps recommended in this proposed plan may place short run pressures on foster care staff until the effects are felt from returning more children home or moving more to adoptive homes. Shifting responsibility to other staff for services to biological parents and for severance tasks (as recommended in Chapters I and II) should lessen the burden on foster care staff somewhat although these tasks are not occupying a significant percentage of their time now.

Still, there are complaints concerning the caseloads being carried. Foster care loads in Florida are high, but perhaps not as high as some estimates have cited. If, for example, we calculate the client/staff ratio for the 7,731 present foster care children being served by 271 workers (number of "positions" listed currently), an average caseload of 28 cases per worker is found. We realize that these workers also have responsibility for the parents of these children. However, all indications are that time limitations have prevented workers from providing for many of those needs.

We also are aware that some of the 271 workers perform other duties (i.e., severance of parental ties and adoption) and therefore, 271 may be an exaggerated number assigned to "foster care" services. Our interviews with 13 foster care workers, representing the 11 Districts, showed an average caseload of 55, ten beyond the Child Welfare League recommended standard of 45, and very similar to other states, such as Arizona (60), California (50), and Vermont (50). However, the staff interviewed tended to be the more experienced, senior workers and probably able to handle larger caseloads than more junior staff.

We suggest that several steps be taken to provide a rational assessment of foster care staff needs. These include:

- After necessary staff changes are made, as recommended in Chapters I and II, caseload adjustments from the new foster care caseload can be made. All cases should contain permanency plan objectives.

- From this base, we suggest an intensive random moment study be conducted with existing DHRS resources. The study should provide data on how workers are spending their time in attempting to achieve case objectives.

- Results of the random moment study should provide data for a workload measures study. Such a study should examine what types of cases require what kinds and amounts of services to achieve the permanency objectives. Findings should be helpful in assessing and justifying system-wide service needs, caseload expectations, and budget requests. Standards for worker performance should be developed as a result and can be used in supervisory evaluation discussions. The Child Welfare League of America has some data on workload measures which may be helpful in formulating the study.

- Results of these studies should provide rational answers to foster care staff needs. If additional staff is justified, data obtained should considerably strengthen any financial requests.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary of DHRS should conduct an in-house random moment and workload measure study of foster care staff.

3.5 Review of the Specialization/ Generalization of Single Intake

Much concern is also expressed by staff throughout the State regarding the loss of specialization and the concomitant move towards generalization in the provision of services brought about since Departmental reorganization. This concern was most frequently articulated in our staff interviews (although by no means exclusively) when Single Intake was discussed. Specifically, it appears that most District administrators are interpreting the legislative mandate as requiring a random assignment of all new intakes to a group of intake worker generalists.

The concern raised by staff is that the special skills required to provide adequate intake services for all types of clients cannot be best met by the generalist approach. A training effort (discussed in Chapter V) could assist in reducing many of the worker anxieties over these issues.

Although Single Intake staff must be able to handle either infant abuse or adolescent delinquency cases, good supervisory practice calls for case assignments on a basis which makes maximum use of worker strengths, particularly in more difficult cases. This should not imply, however, the liberty to assign cases in such a manner to maintain pre-reorganization specialties, thus subverting the legislative intent to create a Single Intake system for dependents and delinquents.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (A)

The Secretary should issue policy guidance to District Administrators clarifying their flexibility in Single Intake case assignments.

3.6 Change in Legal Treatment of Ungovernables

Along with Single Intake, another legislative revision removed status offenders from the jurisdiction of Youth Services and placed them, along with dependent children, within the Family and Childrens Service Unit of SES. It is a reform of which the State should be most proud. However, within this new law, a large loophole was left open which requires immediate attention, if the purposes of the reform are to be realized. Specifically, the law allows second offense ungovernables to be treated as delinquents. This exception seriously hampers the intent of the reform and violates the best thinking of current national efforts related to this subject.

Ungovernable children should be classified as dependent children regardless of the repeated nature of their behavior. Permitting escalation to juvenile delinquent jurisdiction of any young person who has never commited an act which would be criminal if commited by an adult, defeats the basic separation principle which is the basis of the reform. Although an argument can be made for ending the frustration of parents and courts by locking up such a child with those who have commited serious crimes, the contamination and negative results of comingling clearly outweigh the merits.

Recent recommendations to the President's Committee on Criminal Justice, chaired by the Hon. Brendon Byrne of New Jersey, suggesting the exercising of jurisdiction over families and children together when status behavior is the issue, should be reviewed.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (L)

The Legislature should consider additional statutory change which prevents ungovernables from being treated as delinquents and recognizes the ungovernable and status offender problem as a joint concern of parent(s) and child.

3.7 Department Group Home and Licensing Policy Task Force

Several of the sister units within DHRS (MR, MH, YS, and SES) all have a need to recruit and maintain group home parents. All, however, pay different board rates, maintain their own recruitment efforts, and have differing definitions and number requirements for group facilities. All this has produced an internal competition for the same parents and consequently many intra-departmental staff concerns. The licensing for child service facilities is fraught with inconsistancies and division of responsibilities that has produced a deterrant to recruiting and maintaining prospective service providers.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary should appoint a task force on group home and licensing policy coordination. The task force should be responsible for reviewing recruitment, uniform board rate setting, and uniform definitions of group homes of all DHRS units providing group home care.

In addition, a thorough review should be made of DHRS licensing requirements in support of all children's services. The task force should develop and recommend to the Secretary policy, procedures, guidelines, and draft legislation necessary to assure a department-wide uniform policy which optimizes DHRS support to all childrens programs in which licensing is involved.

3.8 Upgrading of Foster Care Service Through the Implementation of National Standards

Recently, National Standards for Foster Family Service Systems were developed by the DHEW Childrens Bureau and the American Public Welfare Association. A publication was written designed to establish a basic level of foster family services for public agencies and to improve the quality of service within a given, reasonable time. All relevant components of foster family service are discussed with minimum standards and steps for implementation included. The publication was utilized by DHRS in a recent program manual revision. The Department is to be commended for its initial use of the document. It is now necessary to take the next steps to formalize the adoption of these standards into future practice.

RECOMMENDATION: YEARS 1 and 2 (A)

The Director of SES should continue the process of implementing the national foster care standards.

3.9 Development of New Foster Care Facilities for Adolescent Children in Special Needs

The most pressing service problem in foster care in Florida, as defined by our questionnaire results and interviews,is the lack of appropriate foster care facilities for adolescents, emotionally disturbed children, older children with special needs and status offenders.

This group in total represents between 30-40 percent, or approximately 2,500 children of the DHRS foster care referrals - and the number is increasing. Facilities within the State which can appropriately provide for the care of these children are few. Nor are there any apparent resources presently available to develop them. The only resource currently available is in foster family homes which are inappropriate for a large majority of these children. They become used only because of their availability.

The existing alternatives are even more inappropriate. They include a return to the dysfunctioning family, state mental hospitals, constant movement from one foster family home to another, the child running away, or the committing of a delinquent act which is not serious enough to warrant adjudication and treatment through Youth Services.

The only placements available are provided by private treatment facilities, and these are extremely limited, very costly (usually $10 - $20,000 annually per child in 24-hour care), and often of questionable quality.

The foster care caseloads are disrupted by the disproportionate amount of time which must be spent on these time-consuming cases. Further, workers and supervisors do not have the skills or time necessary to provide adequate rehabilitative family counseling services to the biological parents of these children. Questionnaire results note staff requests for training in this area. The level of dysfunction and disturbance of the family is often such as to preclude effective rehabilitation of the family. Recruitment of homes for these children is difficult and also time consuming. Many are too old to benefit from traditional foster homes.

What is called for is recognition of the magnitude of the problem (2,500 children); the costs involved in the provision of appropriate care; the multi-problem nature of the population; and the need for a comprehensive, DHRS-wide mobilization effort. The present DHRS intra-departmental committee addressing the needs of the emotionally disturbed child is a good step in this direction.

SES, Youth Services, Mental Retardation, and Mental Health all are deeply involved with this same target group, but all have differing responsibilities and perspectives. A department-wide needs assessment of this population is indicated, followed by a department-wide resource allocation to meet the identified needs. Additional resources will undoubtedly be needed, but requests must be justified with hard data produced by the activity described above.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary should expand the scope of the DHRS Committee on the Needs of the Emotionally Distrubed Child to include the conduct of a needs assessment of the 2,500 teenage children with special needs. This should result in the development of a department-wide plan for the allocation of resources necessary to better provide for their care and treatment.

3.10 Use of Purchase of Service Contracts

The decision of whether to purchase a service, or provide it directly by the Department, is one which must be made in accordance with a rational Department plan for providing services designed to achieve agreed upon objectives, based upon client needs. This rational planning process has begun within DHRS. The Department has completed a Title XX Needs Assessment Survey and has utilized the results in determining Title XX service needs. In addition, Florida has a most progressive budgeting system which combines both state and federal (Title XX) resources into one budget. Many states still manage their federal dollars as "add-ons" to state funds which may, or may not, be used for supporting top priority programs. (In essence, a double planning/budgeting system.)

A major problem, largely due to the ceiling on Title XX funds, is the tendency to keep spending social service money on the same "priorities." More could be done (perhaps including zero base budgeting) to open up the process of reassessing which services should be purchased and in what amounts.

Improvement could also be made in assuring accountability through more effective monitoring to assure providers are in accordance with contract provisions. We are aware of only two situations in which any evaluation of a purchase contract led to a termination, non-renewal, or major change in contractual provisions. This causes us to question the real flexibility available with Title XX purchase funds if a change in Departmental objectives takes place as is recommended in this plan.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary should initiate a review of the monitoring and accountability provisions of the purchase of service contracts funded by Title XX and develop procedures which allow for the most flexible use of these purchase funds to meet changing Department priorities.

3.11 Use of Volunteers

Evidence from questionnaires and interviews reflect a considerable amount of time being taken by foster care workers in such tasks as transportation of children to and from other services. While it is important for the caseworkers to have contact with their clients, they complained of the disproportionate time spent on tasks that keep them in too much of a reactive mode (i.e., case maintenance and crisis services).

We are not aware of any special efforts by the Department to recruit and use volunteers for work with clients, but many agencies have been successful in using this potential resource. A good staff person in the District Office is required to properly organize and oversee the effort. It can, however, pay dividends, including the enhancement of the Department's public education effort to promote understanding in the community and obtain outside support.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary should request District Administrators to experiment with the use of volunteers in providing services (such as transportation) designed to free up staff for other necessary functions.

IV. INFORMATION AND REPORTING SYSTEM SUPPORT

4.0 Background

Currently, DHRS has several basic information systems in place or in process. This study was not designed to evaluate all of them in detail, but, rather, to see that necessary steps were included in the plan to satisfy short and long range information needs, especially as they relate to children in the Department's protective care. Key systems for consideration include the following:

4.0.1 "Voucher for Services" System for Foster Care

Many of the limited child welfare statistics previously available in Florida have depended on the data gathered under this system, which is primarily a financial management tool.

Recorded in parallel with financial data is information on services provided to children under care. A time-consuming, accounting-oriented, balancing of financial and program data has been used up until the recent reorganization of the Department. There is currently little support for the clerical investment required to maintain the integrity of the program statistics end of this system. The program statistics could be obtained via case management reporting, supplemented by the financial data from a simplified voucher system.

4.0.2 Goal Oriented Social Services (GOSS) System, and Service Planning and Reporting System (SPARS)

There is a high degree of confusion between these two related systems, aggrevated by recent changes in personnel.

The GOSS system, implemented for SES related service programs, is intended to be a case management system. An adaptation of the system is also being used in other program units as a means of reporting on services to Title XX eligible clients, and is designated as SPARS when used in this manner.

The basic GOSS system has been implemented over the past two years and has filled an important need for planning statistics and for information for Federal reimbursement. But as reflected in the project questionnaires and interviews, the system is very unpopular with staff. Among the factors:

- The error rate is high. Error correction, in turn, increases administrative time by workers. And the error correction process, itself, tends to produce more errors, compounding the problem;

- Much of the worker-system interaction relies on numeric coding which requires looking up codes, both to input the system, and to interpret output reports;

- Middle management has not been trained in the uses of the system, and little time has been taken to review worker progress and needs based on GOSS reports. Therefore, workers tend to put off system entries, to leave errors uncorrected, and/or to use those codes which are most familiar, thus short-cutting the system's intent. All of this tends to depreciate the absolute value of GOSS and the perceived value in the eyes of the users; and

- Middle management understandably feels either they do not get reports on the factors they need to know about, or they get reports they can't use due to unreliability.

The SPARS adaptation of GOSS meets with even greater resistance as used by workers in other program areas. In addition to the above objections, there are no output reports coming back to those workers and supervisors. In addition, the system is duplicative of "their own" program unique information system (some 16 others within DHRS).

It is an understatement to say that there is a high level of frustration with GOSS at the worker and supervisory levels. At the same time, the Department needs the basic data for several purposes and should be commended for making the effort to implement a computer-supported system. The staff who have persevered in trying to make the system work are even more to be praised.

4.0.3 Youth Services "Stat Card" System

The Youth Services "Stat Card" system, designed by the former Division of Youth Services, takes on added significance in light of the legislative mandate for the "single intake" of children and youth requiring YS and SES program services.

The YS "Stat Card" records statistical data on a youth at the points of intake and disposition, and these data are aggregated for quarterly reports comparing the Districts' experience with each other, and against a Juvenile Justice Normative Analysis Scale (JJNAS). This system does not attempt to be a tracking system, though it does have an on-line capacity for recalling aggregate data through the Florida State University computer.

A revision of the YS Stat Card is currently underway in view of the creation of the Single Intake system. A revision can provide a good statistical profile, but will not provide the tracking (automatic reminder or signallin,) system ultimately needed to tie in with the intake process. That is, the Single Intake process should feed necessary case data on a client into the case management information system for individual client tracking by either the Single Intake worker or the YS or SES-related service worker.

In addition to these major reporting systems in place, there are also manual reports (e.g., adoptions) presently being used. There are also two developmental projects worth noting: The Client Information System, and the Child and Youth Centered Information System.

4.0.4 Client Information System (CIS)

This prototype system is now undergoing development and field testing in District IV. It was derived explicitly from the 1975 Reorganization Act which mandated "management data, client data and program data for the on-going administration of service delivery, as well as for the purpose of management decisions."

The CIS, as presently developed, is a core system of basic client identification which also indicates the program component(s) and offices providing service.

This core will later be linked with the program-specific sub-system for detailed case management. The first sub-system planned for linking with CIS is the GOSS System.

4.0.5 Child and Youth Centered Information System (CYCIS)

A year ago, DHRS indicated its interest in joining with a few other key states, in developing a basic case management system covering children and youth in the custody of DHRS. The effort was to be funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

After a default by the lead state, the Clark Foundation reorganized the project with new sponsoring organizations: The Child Welfare League of America, the National Council of Juvenile Court Judges, and the American Public Welfare Association.

Florida now has the opportunity to participate in this restructured project which would produce a detailed design, followed by programming and installation of a system which could tie Single Intake together with YS and SES program functions around each client. CYCIS would permit horizontal control among Courts, YS, SES,and even private providers as it relates to their various responsibilities for a given client.

4.1 Long Range System Objective

There is among the DHRS rank and file, a strong compulsion to abandon GOSS because "it is more trouble than it's worth." The immediate popularity of that decision would be strongly offset by the increasing reporting demands on workers and, the longer range difficulties of climbing back up the ladder to the computer-worker interaction mode - the place where the agency must end up. Unless there is an extreme breakdown, it is usually better to convert to a new computer-supported system from an existing one than to start again from scratch. However, while it is clear that the GOSS system is, at least, in the danger zone, it is not clear that the defects are "extreme" enough to suffer the manual alternative to GOSS until another computer replacement is available.

In making a decision about GOSS it is necessary, first, to reaffirm or reestablish department goals and objectives with respect to information systems.

RECOMMENDED OBJECTIVE:

The Secretary of DHRS should set a long range objective for an information system which has immediate access, is a computer-supported system, and contains:

- Basic client data -- a core file common to all DHRS service units.
- A summary record of current client service status, with a link to individual sub-systems containing the particular case management data relating to service provision, by each major providing unit; and
- A sub-system relating to children and youth in DHRS custody, operated as a case-management -- as opposed to statistical -- reporting system, and encompassing Single Intake, youth services, and SES children's services.

  An extension of this sub-system would cover other social services, but with different data elements for different client service types. This sub-system arrangement would replace the present GOSS system.

4.2 Short Range Action Steps In System Development To Achieve The Long Range Objective

There are some short range steps currently underway, or which should be taken immediately, to move toward the achievement of the long range objective.

4.2.1 CIS Test

RECOMMENDATION: YEARS 1 and 2 (A)

DHRS should continue the CIS test and implement the core system in all Districts, revising the input form to be less machine-oriented, and the output display to be translated to English in all possible fields.

4.2.2 Join CYCIS

RECOMMENDATION: YEARS 1, 2 and 3 (A)

DHRS should join in the Child and Youth Centered Information System (CYCIS) project to begin in March 1977.

The joining of CYCIS would signify to field staff a commitment to replace existing systems through a process sensitive to supervisor and worker needs. The design should be completed within one year and be ready for programming into the CIS network which by then, should be statewide. If CYCIS is successful, the remaining client services covered by GOSS can be similarly transformed to fit on-line operation in a form more accurately and easily used by case workers.

4.2.3 Establish System Development Group

In these system development efforts it would be helpful to have staff in the Planning Office equipped to work with the Office of Management System (OMS) on the administrative side of the Department. This balance would protect the OMS against too much responsibility for services-oriented systems by building in a heavier program unit involvement in the design and implementation. The risk and the investment are too great to leave leadership to the "System" people alone on either side of the organization.

A system planning group working with the Assistant Secretary for Planning would be a key resource for relating to service workers and managers in the training and implementation phase.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 1 (A)

> The Secretary of DHRS should consider establishing a small system development group in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning.

4.3 Interim Objective and Action Steps in Support of Current Program Needs

Notwithstanding the defects in GOSS as reported by workers, revising it on an interim basis (which includes short range improvements in format, coding references, edit procedures, etc.) and making it work for supervisors and workers through a strong management commitment may well do more to build real communication around client problems than eliminating the system altogether. The new requirement for Judicial reviews, and other initiatives included in this Plan offer an opportunity for the kind of middle management involvement that can help bring about an improved system.

Therefore we make the following recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION: YEARS 1 and 2 (A)

> The Secretary of DHRS should set the following interim objective for using existing information systems in Family and Children's Services during the next two years:
>
> - Management at each level will interact with staff concerning performance measured against objectives, using GOSS-generated reports from both the Data Center and the Basis Video Terminal in SES, plus selected manual reports;
>
> - Accuracy of worker input will be increased stemming from this interactive process; and
>
> - Output reports will be examined and used by supervisors and workers.

To meet this objective, the following action steps are proposed:

- Define key SES service program information needs during the next two years;
- Conduct District training and consultation;
- Discontinue selected existing reports and initiate a priority for new ones;
- Incorporate Judicial review reporting into the system;
- Return to Districts in six months to reinforce training and to review progress.

4.3.1 Define Key Information Needs

SES staff should develop some tentative, but limited, information needs related to treating the key program objectives outlined in this report. For foster care, for example, they should include:

- Client lists by foster care worker, indicating:
  - -- identifying number of client
  - -- time of entry into foster care
  - -- legal custody
  - -- current condition
  - -- number of replacements
  - -- goal condition
  - -- protective service or adoption worker, if assigned

- Aggregate reports, by District, showing:
  - -- number in foster care at beginning and end of period
  - -- number returning home during period
  - -- number entering care during period
  - -- average number of placements per child, beginning and end of period
  - -- average time in care, beginning and end of period
  - -- number of adoptive placements
  - -- number of neglect-abuse cases during period
  - -- percentage of neglect-abuse cases entering foster care

Most of these data can be extracted from GOSS files and manual reports, but GOSS reporting would have to be upgraded. The precise source of these tentative outputs should be identified and reasonably assured before communicating with the Districts. Also, tentative candidates for discontinued reports should be identified. SES staff indicated they have several in mind.

4.3.2 Conduct District Training and Consultation

Very soon, after completing 4.3.1, an SES leadership team should meet with supervisors first, and then their workers in each District to:

- review current SES information system status;
- demonstrate through examples what Federal and state reports, and other needs, have been met because of worker reporting;
- demonstrate through case examples the intended use of output reports at the District level, emphasizing supervisor-worker review of caseloads and their progress;
- review error correction system;
- solicit preferences on most needed output reports, using tentative report proposals from data listed in 4.3.1;
- determine reports to be discontinued.

4.3.3 Discontinue Selected Existing Reports and Initiate a Priority for New Ones

Based on discussions held with District personnel, reports viewed as low priority should be discontinued and arrangements for machine and/or manual production of agreed upon new ones should be keyed to program objectives. The total number of output reports should be severely limited in number. In addition, summary reports should be designed to compare District performance as a motivation to managers to look for reasons for differences among Districts.

Based on District meetings, the Secretary should expect a revised plan involving the short-term improvement of GOSS and manual reporting procedures to better focus on program objectives.

4.3.4 Incorporate Judicial Review Reporting into the System

Basic data for controlling the court review process are contained in the data specified in 4.3.1. This requirement is a special focus which by its obvious importance can be a key to assuring more accurate input to the GOSS system. It will be necessary to use an interim manual system until GOSS is upgraded to handle this reporting on an accurate and timely basis.

4.3.5 Return to Districts in Six Months to Reinforce Training and to Review Progress

The hypothesis is that if management at every level takes the review process seriously, workers will also, and the upgrading of GOSS and other information system components will take place in the process as a by-product. However, this process

depends on the commitment of the Data.Center to making it work. The Secretary will have to indicate his priority to this task. Note that we do not suggest a general priority on GOSS, nor a general urging of workers to improve their reporting. Rather, we suggest a targeted effort around a very limited task relating to foster care. If this can be successful, then the confidence level for the future of computer-supported case management systems will be raised, along with morale. Larger steps could then more easily follow.

V. TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

5.0 Background

The strategies described in this Report for reducing the number of children in care outside of their own homes and improving the results from foster care, will require an increase in the number of people in the Department who have the specialized skills needed to implement them.

Properly designed, training programs provide one means -- recruitment being another -- for obtaining the necessary skills.

Presently, the State is attempting to operate its programs with an unusually high proportion of people who have had little or no formal training in the techniques of social work and the related professions. Because the State civil service entrance examination does not test applicants' knowledge or skills in these areas, but rather appears to emphasize facility in the use of the English language, the tendency is for an unusually large proportion of English and History majors to obtain relatively high scores on the tests and, thereby, obtain jobs in social service agencies.

While no argument will be made here based on credentialism, it is important to recognize that many of the skills needed for an effective program of children's services generally can be obtained only through formal education combined with continued on-the-job training. Working with seriously depressed adolescent runaways, or with parents who have adopted a special needs child, requires considerable knowledge, training, and skill. It is a highly questionable practice to permit, or even require, untrained workers to assume responsibility for these types of client problems.

Caseworkers interviewed in the survey indicated the extent of their needs for training. Just over half of them felt that their training in casework and caseload management had not been adequate. Eight out of every ten DHRS workers said that they would like to have more training in casework practice and two-thirds of them would like more in caseload management.

Effective service programs require that managers have the techniques necessary for program planning and implementation: such techniques as needs and resource assessment, planning, project management, and evaluation.

Courses in management methods tend to be somewhat limited in schools of social work and students are generally not as interested in them as they are in casework skills. The irony is that because of high turnover among caseworkers in the State, a pervasive condition nationally, caseworkers who stay with their jobs for just a few years are very likely to be selected for supervisory and managerial roles simply because they are available and are relatively experienced. They are well aware of their own needs for training. Six out of every ten administrators interviewed in our survey said that they would like to have more training in administrative techniques and program management.

In addition to these staff within the Department, training for providers from whom the Department purchases services also need help in coping with the children in their care (e.g., foster parents, group home parents, etc.).

5.1 Development of an Annual Comprehensive Career Development and Training Plan

Changes in functions, staff turnover and Department reorganization all emphasize the need for staff training and career development. DHRS can begin to organize to meet this need through the development of both State and individual District comprehensive annual training plans.

The annual training plans should:

- contain a recruitment and selection program for Family and Children's Services staff;
- provide for a training package orienting new staff members to the Department and its programs and to their specific roles and responsibilities within it;
- provide for developing existing staff personnel through a strong in-service training program;
- identify and remove barriers to training and career development and replace them with incentives;
- include an educational leave program;
- build on the existing core of internal knowledge and expertise;
- inform decision-makers and the general public concerning the needs and problems of children and youth in the State;
- provide for training foster care providers and private agency staff; and
- provide for the evaluation of training programs and the dissemination and application of the findings from those evaluations.

RECOMMENDED OBJECTIVE:

> The Secretary of DHRS should set an objective with District Administrators to develop and begin implementing an annual comprehensive career development and training plan for all staff providing services to children and their families by the end of the next fiscal year.

5.2 Strategy for Plan Development and Implementation

The following are some action step recommendations for achieving this objective.

5.2.1 Establishment of Career Development and Training Committees Within the District Advisory Councils

It would help develop a momentum for good training programs to use representatives of higher education, associations, and the District Advisory Council in a special committee to assist program staff in each District to identify training needs and resources. The State and the Districts would develop their program plans and then work with their committees and training staffs to develop the training plans. Participants would focus on the development of training plans that link together the contributions that their individual institutions can make to the objectives of the program plan. These contributions would then become a part of each institution's or organization's proposed training plan which would be submitted to the State or the District for approval and funding.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary of DHRS should request District Administrators to form career development and training committees to work with staff to develop training plans in support of priority programs, including protective services, foster care and adoption.

5.2.2 Produce a Training Needs and Resource Assessment, and Start Training

A number of useful studies have been done in Florida that contain data on current training needs and resources in the State. These studies, and the information from our survey, provide adequate data for a needs and resource assessment.

From the material discussed in previous sections, we can already presume some specific areas which should be included during the next year's training.

RECOMMENDATION: YEARS 1 and 2 (A)

The SES Program Office should work with the Districts to provide the following training:

- Orientation to roles and responsibilities of Single Intake, protective services, foster care, and adoption workers, including their relationships to each other and to the various District program specialists and managers.
- Training in the new adoption subsidy and court review laws, including new DHRS procedures, review of other child welfare statutes and regulations, including changing views on the rights of parents and the rights of children,
- Training in the existing and proposed revisions of the reporting systems (as discussed in Chapter IV).
- Specialized training, including case discussions on counseling and negotiating "contracts" with biological parents, case management and objective setting, severance proceedings, recruiting and preparing adoptive parents, working with the emotionally disturbed child, etc.

5.2.3 Use of Universities and Colleges

Universities and colleges should be strongly encouraged to develop courses that take employee work schedules into account. Some of the techniques that should be considered are:

- Outreach teaching in the field where the agencies are actually located. This practice exists in Florida now, but it could be greatly expanded;
- Evening courses;
- Courses that are taught in one or two weeks, eight hours each day, and for which leave time can be provided;
- Utilizing standard and cable television to provide courses, particularly for foster parents.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary of DHRS should initiate efforts to maximize the use of Florida based universities and colleges in the development and conduct of the annual comprehensive training and career development plans.

5.2.4 Use of Potential Resources

While the needs are great, so are the opportunities.

There are adequate existing resources to provide the training needed to implement the recommendations in this Report. Title XX of the Social Security Act provides Federal matching funds to the states for training.

These funds are available outside of the expenditure ceiling written into the law. If the State is willing to provide the 25 percent matching funds, there is no limit on the amount of Federal funds that can be made available for training. By using State funds for higher education to match the Title XX funds, additional money can be generated for training without necessarily increasing State expenditures. This can be accomplished by requiring the universities to provide the matching funds from their existing budgets. This is becoming a common practice in other states. Because many other sources of funding that were so abundant in the 1960's are no longer available, many state universities, as well as private institutions, are most willing to accept this arrangement.

In any case, efforts of these institutions should be employed in conjunction with the use of State and District staff to maintain control and better assure reality in the training.

RECOMMENDATION: YEAR 2 (A)

The Secretary of DHRS should explore the cooperative use of the Title XX open-ended provision for training with Florida based universities and colleges to generate funds necessary for implementing the annual career development and training plan.

5.3 Conduct of an Evaluation of the Training and Career Development Program

If evaluations of training are done at all they are usually process evaluations using subjective measures of teaching effectiveness and the value of the knowledge imparted and the materials used. While such process evaluations are useful, greater emphasis should be given to obtain outcome measures. What impacts did the training have on achieving the outcomes of the program: Were the people who were trained in the programs more capable of achieving Family and Children's Service objectives?

Without this emphasis, training very often becomes an end in itself, bearing little relationship to program needs. Impact evaluations help to keep training focused on program goals and to assure that it is continually being modified to meet those goals more effectively.

RECOMMENDATION: YEARS 2 and 3 (A)

The Secretary of DHRS should commission an impact evaluation of the career development and training methods utilized within the annual plan and provide and use the results to modify future programs.

5.4 General

These recommendations should undoubtedly apply to staff in other service specialties. It is assumed that an annual Career Development and Training Plan should be developed in each District for all service programs, with guidance on priorities from the Central Office. Such a plan would help focus on the other opportunities to claim Title XX open-ended matching funds throughout DHRS.

Following the basic training of Family and Children's Services staff in roles, responsibilities, and procedures of the new DHRS organization, as cited in these proposals, training should become more individualized, especially concentrating on management and casework skills. A useful approach would be to include individual plans in the District Plan for those who want to participate on a voluntary basis. Formal and special on-the-job training opportunities can be identified to expand skills and knowledge of individual professional staff members. Eventually, an employee evaluation system could be introduced, based on performance against agreed-upon objectives -- one of the best bases for career development.

SUMMARY

These five basic objectives, and their recommended action steps, represent a basis for a three to five year plan to improve the chances of Florida's children placed (or likely to be placed) in foster care to have permanent, stable, and loving homes.

This proposed plan is not a call to do better what is now being done. It is a strategy for reversing a disturbing pattern of increasing long term foster care by dedicating resources and skills in new directions. It means:

1. New efforts and services to prevent the need for foster care; plus specialization and concentrated effort in reuniting more foster care children with their families more rapidly;

2. More timely decisions to terminate parental rights, coupled with major adoptive parent recruitment efforts to honor the right of the child (usually with special needs) to a permanent home;

3. Improvement of the foster care service itself, with aggressive and regular review of those children in care to better assure movement toward the goal of permanence;

4. Commitments to provide information system support that works to assure more timely and appropriate goal setting, decision-making and service provision; and

5. Training and career development support which will sufficiently augment the case management and supervisory process to insure meeting the first three objectives.

Meeting these objectives should result in a lower percentage of Florida's children in foster care, given no overall worsening of general social and economic conditions. Not only will this mean savings to taxpayers, but a better opportunity for more children to develop as contributing citizens and as parents to the next generation.

The Secretary and the Department's Office of Social and Economic Services have made an excellent start in implementing this jointly developed plan. We hope they will receive the support of the Legislature and the public so necessary for making the major initiatives that still lie ahead.

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FOOTNOTES

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